

February 3, 2011

Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services

Re: Emergency Food Funding

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to request funding for emergency food in HB2. My name is Jesse Oldham. I am the Emergency Services Coordinator for the Salvation Army in Cascade County, as well as the Family/Social Services Warehouse Supervisor, responsible for our food basket program. The Salvation Army in Great Falls supports the Montana Food Bank Network in their efforts to address hunger throughout Montana.

In the New Testament of the Bible, we hear Jesus rebuking a disciple over an item of value, telling that disciple, "the poor always you have with you". This is as true today as it was during the time of Christ. From January 1, 2009 until December 31, 2010 (2 years) The Salvation Army in Great Falls has provided 6,155 food baskets to residents of Great Falls and Cascade County. We have seen an increase in demand of 17% in 2010 over 2009. January-June 2010 saw a 30% increase over the same period in 2009.

Emergency food funding provided over the past year and a half has been significant to us. Without it we would have had to make cuts to our other services or restrict our food basket assistance.

Just over half of all the people we serve have only come for emergency food ONE TIME. Our services are not always an ongoing need for people, and having the ability to provide the help a family needs so they don't go hungry and can get by without government assistance during a difficult time is advantageous.

We are only able to help those in need through the generous and compassionate donations of those who want to positively affect their world. We are truly grateful to those donors, yet the donations made cannot meet the current need.

During these harsh economic times, the need can be overwhelming. I've read that wholesale and retail food prices are on the upswing again. Gasoline is reaching above \$3.00 per gallon and some pundits are predicting that \$5.00 per gallon gasoline is inevitable. The Government does not include energy and food prices when computing the Consumer Price Index, thus presenting a distorted picture of reality. These things result in consequences that must be dealt with; usually by those least able to afford them—those who are only trying to survive from day to day and week to week. These are those people and families that depend on the network of emergency food providers.

On their behalf and in their stead, I urge you to include emergency food funding in HB2.
Thank you.

Jesse E. Oldham, Jr.
Emergency/Disaster Services Coordinator
Family/Social Services Warehouse Supervisor
The Salvation Army, Great Falls, Montana

February 3, 2011

2011 Montana Legislature
Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services

REF: Funding for Emergency Food Purchase

As the Executive Director of a private non-profit social service agency in Billings, Montana, I see everyday the devastation of individuals and families who are in the low-income category. The families that we see daily are living and struggling at the below poverty level, they are suffering from job loss and the reduction of workweek hours. The very large majority are working, but at jobs that do not pay a living wage and without benefits, in Montana only about 20% of the jobs pay what is considered a living wage.

The most alarming fact is that there is children involved in these families, and I can tell you that in Billings and Yellowstone County there is children and adults that go to bed at night without a proper meal.

Family Service, Inc is one of 194 partner agencies that depends on the Montana Food Bank Network for the delivery of food that goes to assist the low-income families of Billings and Yellowstone County. On a monthly basis we provide food boxes for close to 800 families and we have experienced increasing numbers over the past two years.

I have always been proud to say that Montana does not have to take a back seat to any state in the nation when it comes to taking care of it own neighbors in need, and with that in mind, I urge the Montana Legislature to approve funding for emergency food purchase to provide \$1 million in state funding for the 194 food partner agencies to share.

Sincerely,
Paul L Chinberg
Executive Director
Family Service, Inc
Billings, Montana
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Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services
February 3, 2011

Re: Emergency Food Funding

Hello, my name is Vicky Wetz, I am the Valley County Council on Aging Coordinator. Our agency has served approximately 1,500 meals since July. Our agency includes Fort Peck, Opheim, Hinsdale, Nashua, Frazer, and Glasgow. We have served over 300 seniors.

I am writing to you to express the importance of emergency food funding. Over the past few years this funding has helped supplement my food budget.

We serve 17 home delivered meals and nearly 35 in-house everyday in Glasgow. These are all elderly and need the balanced meal daily. My budget is in grave danger of being reduced even more and I will have to make some cuts to services. With the high price of medications, water, taxes, groceries, and all utilities, these people are at great risk. Often this is the only warm meal some of them will get.

We supplement our budget with the emergency food funding to help stretch our small budget and help feed the at-risk elderly. The cost of living goes up and they aren't getting a cost of living increase on their social security. How sad.

Please support an Amendment to House Bill 2 for Emergency Food Purchase Funding.

Sincerely,

Vicky L. Wetz
Valley County Council on Aging
501 Court Square #16
Glasgow, MT 59230

February 3, 2011

Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services

Re: Emergency Food Funding

I would be very concerned and worried if the emergency food funding was cut back or cut out. It is a great support for our Big Timber Community Food Bank here in Big Timber. The number of clients and people we feed has increased immensely and if the economy continues as it is we will have more. At the present time we have 49 volunteers working to feed 1,000 plus people including quite a few children. The job situation is very poor here right now which means more people are coming for help.

It is sad to hear a 5 year old who came in with his grandma and stated that he was living with his grandma and they don't have any food.

We take a lot of pride in the food we offer to our clients. We concentrate on healthy food and do all we can to help people learn how to cook and make their food go farther. In spite of the food we get from Montana Food Bank Network, we must keep our shelves stocked with our own shopping. We must depend solely on donations (both food and money). We are now occupying a building which is costing us rent, etc., so if we should lose our food purchase funding support it would cut deeply into our budget.

Please continue to support us with HB 2.

Joanne Stief,
Chairman
Big Timber Community Food Bank